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ABSTRACT

This article briefly describes Rational Emotive or Rational Behavior Therapy. Some historical data is given regarding its developer, Dr. Albert Ellis, and his beliefs. In addition the following rational concepts are examined: (1) the anatomy of an emotion; (2) the characteristics of rational thoughts; and (3) the rational self-analysis of thoughts. Finally, 10 irrational beliefs which consistently interfere with people's ability to function appropriately are outlined. The addresses of the two most important Rational Emotive training centers are also given. (Author)

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If You Want To Feel Better - Try Thinking Better!

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If You Want To Feel Better — Try Thinking Better!

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The thought conveyed by the title of this article basically sums up the thinking of those psychotherapists known as "Rational Behavior Therapists." Rational therapy which was developed about 20 years ago by Dr. Albert Ellis, Executive Director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Rational Psychotherapy, emphasizes the close relationship between our thoughts, emotions, and actions. The therapy sessions conducted by rational therapists focus on the client understanding that relationship and intelligently reorganizing and disciplining their thinking processes.

Rational behavior therapists divide thoughts into essentially two groupings: 1) rational and/or irrational. Rational thoughts are loosely defined as those which are self-enhancing, tolerant, self-preserving, and growth-oriented. Whereas, irrational thoughts would be those which are self-damaging, intolerant or self-destructive. These thought patterns constitute an individual's belief system which is directly related to that person's emotional reactions and eventual acts. Rational therapists see the anatomy of an emotion as involving some definite sequences:

1) First one experiences an activating event (A), that is, you see, hear, smell or taste something;

2) Next, your belief system (B) comes into play, that is, one has thoughts or self-talk regarding the activating event (A):

3) Then, we have a gut-level or emotional reaction following this sequence (C), based upon our perceptions and belief system; and

4) Last, the person engages in some type of behavior (D) which follows A, B, and C.

The reader might say at this point that this system is much too simple, but hundreds of research studies say that you are wrong. Others might say that they do not always stop at point B and think about an activating event, and this is true. For many of us, our thought patterns have become so automatic and habitual (other therapists might say the thoughts are in our unconscious) that particular activating events swiftly lead to expected emotional reactions and behaviors.

An example of this whole process follows:

Person #1	Person #2
A. Person #1 is standing next to an Olympic-Size swimming pool.	A. Person #2 is also standing next to the same pool.
B. Person #1 begins telling himself that he should be careful. He cannot swim and he might fall in. If he did, he would probably drown. Water should be avoided (IB).	B. Person #2 tells himself that the same pool is just beautiful and that the water looks great. He further self-verbalizes that he would love to go for a swim (RB).
C. Then Person #1 begins to feel anxious and fearful. He becomes nervous, perspires profusely, and his heart starts pounding.	C. #2 begins to feel calm and serene, and he experiences no nervousness. He is only anxious to jump in the pool..
D. Person #1 swiftly gets as far away from the pool as possible. He doesn't even want to be near the pool.	D. Person #2 goes for a swim and enjoys himself.

This same procedure can be applied to other emotional reactions and behaviors. Rational therapists in essence emphasize that facts and events do not cause

emotional feelings; rather it is what one thinks and believes about facts and events that cause emotional feelings. For example, the statement, "she makes me nervous," would be considered an irrational statement, because you would actually make yourself nervous by pondering thoughts pertaining to her.

What Are Rational Thoughts And How Can One Analyze His Thoughts?

Dr. Maxie C. Maultsby, Jr., a leading rational psychotherapist and psychiatrist at the University of Kentucky Medical Center, offers five characteristics of rational thinking. He states that rational thoughts are:

1) True.
2) They lead you to protect your life.
3) They help you to get what you want quickly.
4) Rational thoughts keep you from feeling the way you don't want to feel.
5) They keep you out of the trouble you don't want.

Dr. Maultsby uses these characteristics of rational thinking in his therapeutic method to rationally analyze and evaluate thoughts which he calls Rational Self-Analysis (RSA). He developed this technique to allow both therapists and clients to rationally challenge thoughts which are leading to personally destructive behavior. An example of this procedure follows:

Rational Self-Analysis

The RSA is divided into three parts which correspond to the anatomy of an emotion. First, one records the objective facts pertaining to an event.

Then one's thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about those facts is recorded, and finally your emotional response to them is written. In addition, the five characteristics of reational thinking are written and then used to challenge any of your irrational thoughts about the facts. Also, one should write rational substitutes for any irrational thoughts.

Sections	Challenges
A - (Facts and Events) She makes me nervous. Everytime that beautiful girl walks into the room, she makes me nervous.	(Rational Challenges to A) Is this statement true? Really does she make you nervous. Don't you actually make yourself nervous. You don't even know her and she doesn't even know you. What do you actually see. A girl who strikes you as being beautiful walks into the room that you are sitting in. She neither speaks to you nor knows you. You have never spoken to her. How in the world can she make you nervous!
B - (Thoughts or Self-verbalizations) IB. She is so beautiful. I would like to ask her out, but she would never accept a date with me.	(Rational Challenges to B) RB. 1. Yes, it is true that she is beautiful. Also, the reason for your anxiety relating to her is becoming more obvious. You are thinking that you would like to ask her out, but that she would not accept a date with you. 2. Thinking like this will probably not lead you to protect your life because you may make yourself so depressed that you might contemplate suicide. 3. In addition, thinking negative thoughts about your chances of dating this woman will definitely not help you to get what you want quickly--a date with her. How do you actually know that she would never accept a date with you? Others have told you that you are attractive and have a good person-

	(Rational Challenges to B) ality. You won't know until you ask. But what if she turns you down; will it be the end of the world? There are other girls that you can ask out. 4. Does this thought keep you from feeling the way you want to feel? It sure does! You want to feel positive about yourself, self-confident, and free of anxiety. 5. And boy can these thoughts get you into trouble! You may continue to depress yourself so, that you may think that only drugs, medications, or alcohol can help you.
C - (Feelings) I feel anxious, nervous, uptight, and very unsure of myself.	(The way you want to feel) Calm and good about myself.

The process of analyzing thoughts rationally can help you to redirect both your thoughts and your behavior. A rational response following this RSA would be for the gentleman to introduce himself to the lady in some manner, decide then if he wanted to ask her out, and proceed from that point.

Dr. Albert Ellis offers ten irrational ideas or beliefs which consistently interfere with man's ability to function appropriately with others or in society. They are:

1. You must have love.
2. You must be thoroughly competent, adequate, or achieving or (have competence in an important area).
3. When people act unfairly, you must blame and damn them and see them as bad, rotten, or wicked.
4. You must view things as awful, terrible, horrible and catastrophic when you get treated badly, unfairly, or are rejected.

5. Emotional misery comes from external pressures and that you have little ability to control or change your feelings.

6. The idea that if something seems dangerous or fearsome, you must preoccupy yourself with and make yourself anxious about it.

7. You can more easily avoid facing many life difficulties and self-responsibilities than undertake more rewarding forms of self-discipline.

8. Your past remains all important and that because something once strongly influenced your life, it has to keep determining your feelings and behavior today.

9. People and things should turn out better than they do and that you must view it as awful and horrible if you do not find good solutions to life's grim realities.

10. You can achieve maximum happiness by inertia and inaction or by passively and uncommittedly "enjoying yourself."

This discription can only give you a very general idea regarding rational therapy and its principles, but clinical practice and research found it to be a most efficient and effective way to help yourself to a happier life. Further information regarding materials, therapy sessions, or classes can be obtained by writing:

The Institute for Advanced Study
in Rational Psychotherapy
45 East 65th Street
New York, New York 10021

or

The Rational Behavior Training Section
University of Kentucky Medical Center
Lexington, Kentucky 40506